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An eye for the heroic

Francis Haskell

LORENZ E. A. ELTNER
Géricault: His Life and Work
376pp. with 270 illustrations, 44 in colour. Orbis. £40.
0 85613 384 1

When Géricault died in January 1824, after many months of incapacitating illness, he was just thirty-two – five years younger than Raphael and Watteau at their deaths, about the same age as Géricault and Seurat and four years older than Masaccio. The premature death of genius is always painful to contemplate, but it can reasonably be argued that only in the case of Géricault did an early and radically affect the subsequent development of art. In Lorenz Eltner's excellent book, *Géricault, His Life and Work*, we read of him on his sickbed lamenting the waste of his talent – "If only I had painted five pictures! But I have done nothing, absolutely nothing!" – and planning huge paintings of contemporary events which he must have realized he would never be able to carry out. Drawings, however, survive for the "Opening of the Doors of the Spanish Inquisition" and the "African Slave Trade", and they show him still struggling to achieve that balance between the actual and the monumental, the real and the emblematic, which had always inspired his finest work. Had he succeeded his example might have proved to be of decisive importance for the future.

One of the most striking features of the best painting of the nineteenth century is the almost complete absence, following the downfall of Napoleon of images reflecting "public" issues. Between Delacroix's "Liberty on the Barricades" (1831) and Picasso's "Guernica" (1937) it is hard to think of a single major picture except for Manet's "Execution of the Emperor Maximilian" which conveys to us in vivid and memorable form the triumphs and disasters of the intervening hundred years – not merely bloodstained events of the type immortalized in these works but even of the far more peaceful "heroism of modern life" which, for Baudelaire, could embrace a government minister, founding on his political opponents in the Chamber.

The call of Baudelaire (who showed almost no interest in Géricault) for such an art was echoed by many

writers; and a number of artists, either spontaneously or in response to official commissions, tried to supply it: but with only the rarest exceptions their works were of little merit. Delacroix himself turned his back on the modern world to which his works allude only obliquely, and the fiasco of the competition for a painting intended to celebrate the Republic of 1848 made it embarrassingly clear that most gifted artists found it almost impossible to respond to such occasions. Even the monumental realism of Courbet shield

"Inquisition" been painted, they might have shown that his earlier "Raft of the Medusa" was not the isolated freak that it came to seem and might thereby have demonstrated how it was possible to give to the public events of the nineteenth century a dignity which had hitherto been reserved for the treatment of the history and myths of the Bible and of Antiquity.

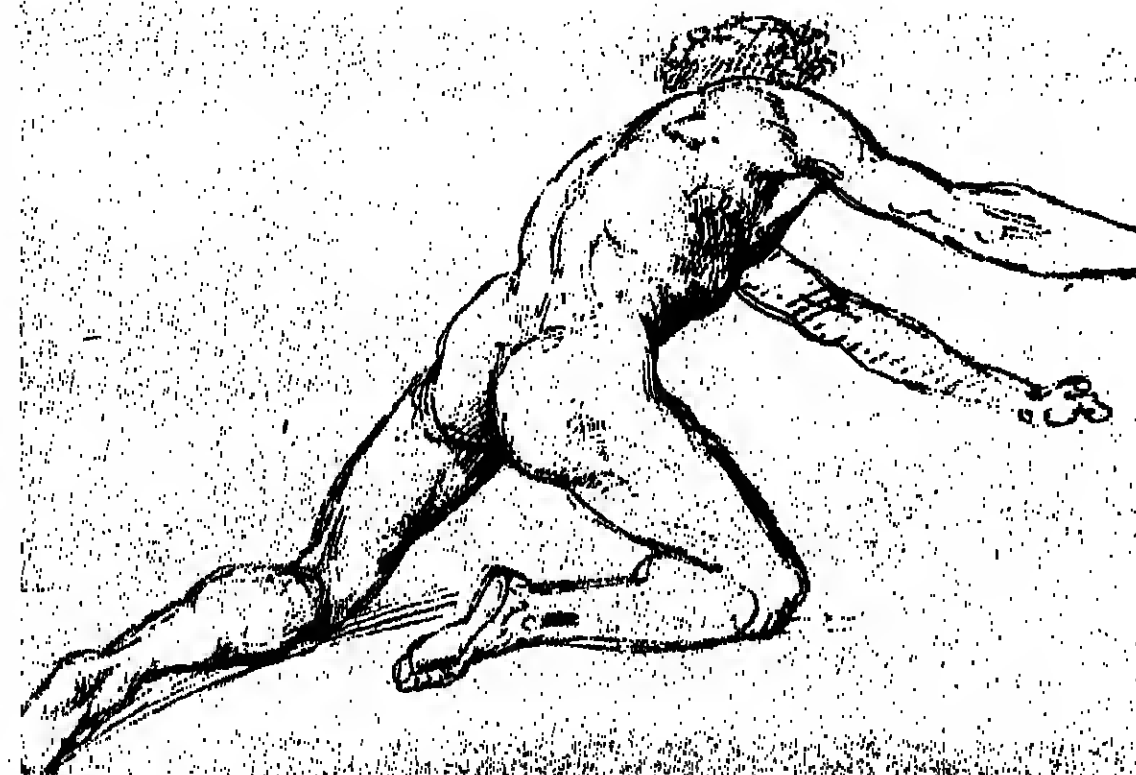
Géricault's ambitions in this respect were formed at a time when a number of other artists (some known to him,

supported him: the State. Eltner is very severe, and on the whole persuasive, in his objections to all those (from some of the Salon critics of the Restoration down to younger art historians – and opera composers – of today) who have tried to read an overt political message into "The Raft of the Medusa". He discusses in detail the rivalries in the King's government which led to the actual complicity of some of its members in publicizing a scandal which had led to atrocious suffering and death; and he emphasizes the

Trade" and "Inquisition" projects. In these circumstances where could such paintings be hung and who could pay for them? It is ironic that by so passionately involving himself in the issues of his day Géricault (who had an independent income) was also inaugurating another tradition – that of the homeless picture destined only for a museum.

The first major book on Géricault, by Charles Clément, was written more than forty years after his death, and it remains a primary source for almost every aspect of the artist's life and work – as well as being an excellent book in its own right. Since then – ie, for more than a hundred years – there have of course been a number of useful catalogues and important articles (many by Eltner himself), but mere substantial works on Géricault have been very rare and mostly unsatisfactory. Indeed, it is impossible to think of a single book, before the appearance of this one, which could be recommended to anyone interested in the life and achievement of one of the most extraordinary painters of the nineteenth century. Fortunately this astonishing neglect has now been made good, and there are even reasons for satisfaction that this long-awaited volume did not appear earlier. For two notable events in Géricault studies have occurred during the last few years.

It had always been known that Géricault's life had been profoundly affected by a troubled love affair and that he had had an illegitimate son; but although Clément knew the details neither he nor any of the artist's friends ever revealed them. Only in 1976 did the truth emerge that Géricault's mistress was in fact his maternal aunt, who was only six years older than himself and who survived him by more than fifty years. In what seems a rather tasteless allusion to *Phèdre* Géricault gave to his son the name Hippolyte, but more important is the impact that this guilt-ridden relationship may have had on his painting. Eltner explores certain pictures with great sensitivity for signs of stress and personal allusions, but these are not easy to find. Although Géricault made some drawings of heterosexual lovers which are intensely erotic, his world is essentially a masculine one of boxers, sailors, jockeys, and soldiers, and he drew a series of arrogantly virile studies of the male nude. Eltner is surely right in discouraging excessively



Géricault's "Study of a kneeling man", pen, 1818-19; reproduced from the book reviewed here.

away from too close a commitment to the present.

Wars and revolutions punctuated the century, governments arose and collapsed, monarchs visited each other and their subjects, scientific achievements changed the appearance of society and the world; and artists depicted all this and much more in canvases of varying sizes which have not entered our imaginary museums. Had Géricault's "Slave Trade" and

some wholly independent) had already proved their interest in similar themes: David, Gros and Goya are the outstanding names among them. But his own aims and even achievements were to some extent more daring than theirs – and raised problems which were never solved. For the pictures which he conceived were not the outcome of official sponsorship – indeed they were to some extent directed against the only body which could have

benevolent reception given to the picture by the King himself and even by some royalist newspapers. But the fact remains that this painting of the disastrous and cruel consequences of official incompetence is probably the first major work of visual art (I do not include caricature in this category) ever to be inspired by antagonism to the "Establishment" – and Eltner's account makes it evident that much the same could be claimed for the "Slave

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This book is a collection of introspective tales. Tales of love and revenge and resolution. But the simple mythic symbolism of the Mabius loop model is, sadly, lost in Mann's attempt to be Proust, Stendhal and Dickens all at once. Branwen's bloodstained could never have stood for so much refection, analysis and morality. And neither can Ralph, Alan or Hubert or Meg or Gwyneth.

Simon Blackburn

Certainly, if the flowers of positivism or of logical analysis or of extended semantic programmes have faded then we need to find new ones. So of course there is a tendency to Indulge *High Talk*: what better policy than to throw off some of our austerity; to let a thousand flowers bloom? Well, perhaps the trouble is that the flowers of philosophy do not bloom by themselves. They need patient and careful cultivation, by people who are good at distinguishing flowers from weeds, and who care about the difference.

Thomas Baldwin

which define the nature of realism, empiricism, and so on. Ethical nihilism can withdraw from the philosophy of language only by abandoning any pretensions to provide a metaphysics of values. It does not follow from this, of course, that Hare's account of the language of morals is correct; but Warnock's criticisms are, for all that, nonetheless seem rather shallow. Universalizability is not a feature of judgments, but only of those which are in some way dependent on the truth of judgments of another class; and Hare does not claim that all moral language is prescriptive, nor that all prescriptive language is moral. He only claims that the concept of obligation is central to ethics, and that it is distinctive, prescriptive, and universalizable. I do not myself wholly endorse Hare's views on these matters; but they certainly do not merit the preposterous treatment that Warnock gives them.

Anne Smith

I say "semi-architectural", because although not thoroughly familiar with the language of architecture, I feel quite sure that even at its worst it does not descend to such descriptions as simple but pleasing, arranged with wreaths and ribbons, or "redolent with twentieth-century banality"; it allows itself the luxury of exclamation like "the back court, with its communal wash-house and bathroom (!)".

Even committed cooks need night off, but what these would have found at the restaurant or café round the corner was mostly miserable in both aim and performance - no gastronomic revolutions there. But elsewhere there was stir and movement. This was the period of Raymond Postgate, the Good Food Club, its *Guide*, and to concentrate much into one name, the Bell Inn at Aston Clinton Buckinghamshire. The first object the Guilders was given by Postgate was "to raise the standard of cooking in Britain", but of course he didn't mean it. In general, he meant in particular the kind of places he had seen in his prosperous socialist life at home in Herefordshire, the masses went back there for their beloved white bread, sugar, sweets, biscuits, cold ham, baked beans, pickles, crisps and the rest of the good things they could, and straight

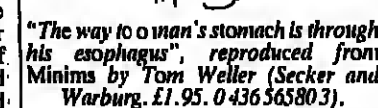
Kingsley Amis

And yet frozen chicken does taste nothing very much, and real Cheddar is much better than whatever it is they give us instead, and out at the supermarket yesterday I was issued with a roll which "crust" must literally have been painted on, because its texture was different from that of the crumb. The chapter on food technology, all about "plant milk" and TVP—texturized vegetable protein taken from soybeans, cottonseed or groundnut and got up as steak or smoked salmon—is no fun to read. Before very long the Guide will be as far out on the fringe as Morris dancers or collectors of New Guinea gear, only working longer hours with all their livestock to look after.

What does this talk of communication and semiotics mean? It's not a new thing, is it? One of Pseudo's Corner, certainly, of introductions to catalogues at art man shows and reviews of works of literary criticism; art talk, in fact. Harm in that, you may say, nothing either; people have always gone about the art of cookery. There is one point that if you call a cook an artist you are stuck with having to find a word to describe Delibes Offenbach, never mind Schumann or Brahms. Still, as long as no one needs that, first and foremost, the middle class, and the first chef a fine fellow, then again all right. The trouble is that Drivat means more than that. Cookery art pretends to be not just an art

It must be added that when Driven is not being tiresome about telecommunications systems or children "the author's style is first-class. For example, 'has some very interesting things to say'—He is good on prices, on taste measurement, on the strictly limited convenience of convenience foods and particularly on how "the British" run their catering industry. Like — dare I say it? — an expert chef, he balances his ingredients of narrative, background fact, figure, illustration and anecdote with a sure hand. Consequently he is able to convey a great deal of information in a most readable form. I found his book thoroughly enjoyable.

But he really should not go mooning on about the absence of a successor and the reports on national food his countrymen are compiling by the marketing division of W. Crawford Ltd and publishers. In 1938 and 1958, valuable as these reports were, Why on earth could he perform or at least organize such investigation himself? That can be his next job.



cuisine"? And I think chop suey originated in America, not China. Never mind. My quarrel is about authenticity. Driver keeps scolding us for normalizing or Anglicizing exotic dishes and not putting up with germs

uniquely ethnic ones. Pfiu! Authenticity has never done anything for me: I go to a restaurant for a meal, not a historical lesson. What we take from others will inevitably and rightly assimilate into what we have already. I wonder if the Driver (who likes musical analogies) enjoys authentic gypsy music more than what Kálmán and Johann Strauss made of it.

And yet frozen chicken does taste nothing very much, and real Cheddar is much better than whatever it is they give us instead, and out at the supermarket yesterday I was issued with a roll which "crust" must literally have been painted on, because its texture was different from that of the crumb. The chapter on food technology, all about "plant milk" and TVP—texturized vegetable protein taken from soybeans, cottonseed or groundnut and got up as steak or smoked salmon—is no fun to read. Before very long the Guide will be as far out on the fringe as Morris dancers or collectors of New Guinea gear, only working longer hours with all their livestock to look after.

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reviewed literary works as if they were weapons to band for his boisterous attack on the political, social and cultural hypocrisies of American life, and, finally, in reading him one feels that the work of literature is but an occasion for yet another unorthodox moral lesson, predictable in its point although filled with delightfully unexpected turns in its manner.

Wilson was serious about the aesthetic character of the literary work and rather than using it as a moral sensibility was responsive to shipping by it. In reading Wilson one has a sense of the way in which great literature alters consciousness, but in reading Mencken one gets the sense that literature is good or bad to the extent that it advances a fixed perception of reality. Mencken is plainer than Wilson; he delivers epigrams that head straight for the pages of *Bartlett's*. Wilson's periods carry us along far more slowly, at times even ponderously. They are designed to take us on a tour of the edifice his intellect has constructed and we must keep to a steady pace but never run, as we visit its many rooms. Mencken's marvellous talent for forceful judgments seems made for the journalist's trade - he astounds us by being the superlative of his kind. But Wilson's intelligence surprises because it seems so unsuited to the demands of journalism and yet makes journalism suit it - makes journalism a superlative kind of writing.

In common with his daemon, Poe, as well as with Mencken, Wilson was very conscious that the range of his learning and the focus of his interest were shared far more by professors than by fellow journalists. His work, accordingly, took on a certain aggressive competitiveness when it approached the neighbourhood of scholarship. In his last years his skirmishes with the academy escalated into a notorious yet not terribly significant battle over the decision of the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund a series of bibliographically "definitive" editions of the works of major American authors rather than the series of one-volume, "readers' editions (modified

after the Pléiade series) he envisioned. Although in his lifetime he lost the battle, he now appears to be winning the war. The kind of editions he hoped for are emerging as "The Library of America", with National Endowment support (*TLS*, June 3), and it is ironic that the enterprise is being conducted, in the main, by professors and is publicized as homage paid to the memory of Edmund Wilson. "The Library" is taken to represent a long overdue reconciliation between the professoriat (a favourite Menckian term) and the great literary practitioner who stood outside it and seemed singlehandedly to outweigh it.

The differences between the two, however, have been exaggerated. Wilson, unlike Poe and Mencken, graduated from a university and always retained an interest in Princeton and its faculty as well as his classmates' fortunes. He taught there for a term as he had taught earlier at the University of Chicago; he acknowledged his indebtedness to professorial books in his own researches; he used the resources of university libraries (most notably Harvard's for *Patriotic Gore*) to the profit of all readers. Indeed, his appetite for the details of authorship was especially attracted to letters, diaries, and recondite lore, the kind of material universities are especially apt at finding and preserving.

There is, though, a deeper division between Wilson and the academy than that of their publicized differences, one that is not closed even by doctoral dissertations on Edmund Wilson. In the three decades preceding his death Wilson was the critic whose weekly writings were most eagerly awaited and widely read by teachers and students of literature in the university who at the same time engaged in critical exercises almost totally removed from what interested them in his work. His intelligence constantly informed theirs - on Yeats or Marx or Ulysses S. Grant - but his empirical method and the massive learning to which it was exercised seemed to offer no imitable approach to the practice of criticism as the theories, for example, of the New Critics or the Freudians or the

Marxists, for all the paucity of their actual results as compared with Wilson's. What Wilson said of his professor, Christian Gauss, might also have been applied to him: "he had no communicable body of doctrine and no pedagogical method that other teachers could learn to apply".

It does not necessarily follow, however, that Wilson's practice is irrelevant to today's lively debate on issues of critical theory. Those who oppose the notion that literature is determined by the existing codes of literature rather than the reality it verbalizes, or the notion that interpretation is limitless rather than single and discoverable, would seem to be those who most admire Wilson's concern for the interdependence of literature and society. But a sampling of his work such as is afforded by *The Portable Edmund Wilson* does not point in this direction. In *Arct's Castle*, for example, Wilson considered Valéry's view that literature is "an art which is based on the nature of language - that is, it is based on language as a creator of illusions, and not on language as a means of transmitting realities". He saw the validity of Valéry's argument as a statement about the intrinsic nature of the literary work. When he took issue he did so by frankly bringing extrinsic criteria to bear, criteria drawn from his historical sense of the spiritual needs of his time. Those who assert a theory of literature's direct mimetic connection with reality might well learn from him that they should examine and then proclaim their moral ground for the assertion rather than insisting that their propositions affirm an intrinsic truth about literary works.

With regard to the question whether the meaning of the literary work is singular and discoverable, Wilson admitted that after we have searchingly scrutinized the work from the historical and biographical points of view we still must be able to tell good from bad and these viewpoints will not provide the judgment. He rejected the idea that the judgment could be made on the basis of whether the work contained certain qualities such as "unity" or

"universality" or "realism", because different schools demand different qualities at different times. Moreover, "you could have any set of these qualities... and still not have a good play, a good novel, or a good poem". Finally, he said, good or bad was a matter of emotional reaction so that literary quality could not be discussed profitably until people found grounds of agreement in the coincidence of their emotional reactions.

In Wilson's thinking, then, we find more than the rudiments of agreement with current theories of interpretation as limitless it was because he believed in the superiority of the meanings assigned by the expert reader, not because he believed meaning was independent of reader response. He bluntly defined the elite as follows: "The impalpable elite as people who know about literature (as is also the case in every other art) is simply that they know what they know, and that they are determined to impose their opinions by main force of eloquence or assertion on the people who do not know."

Wilson maintained his position as a leader of this elite through seeking always to know a good deal, and he accepted the programme of hard work this position required of the critic. In weekly pieces over a period of some four decades he not only imposed his opinion but in so doing brought together an audience of readers who came to share his reactions; he transformed, that is, dentists and shopkeepers, architects and bankers into members of the elite community. His achievement is unparalleled in American literary history and the great loss felt after his death has been the loss of this community. The universities continue to hold their captive audience for serious literature, but no critic or combination of critics has succeeded after Wilson in becoming the voice of that large and elusive group, the unprofessional readers of serious literature. They have been returned to their isolation and no longer exist as a community. Wilson's elitism was free of the political phobias which

masquerade as aesthetic strictures in the criticism of those who pursue Eliot's elitism, as his consistent appeal to a large audience was free of the vulgar mendacities of the mass media. The dissolution of the audience he shaped is a diminution of the quality of life in each home to which the mailman brings the weekly magazines, of the quality of life of every intelligent reader whose literary interests are none the weaker for his needing to have complex matters explained - in short, it is a diminution in the quality of cultural life in America.

The faculty offered the work of the editor of *The Portable Edmund Wilson* by the fact that Wilson constructed almost all of his writing in short, detachable units is outweighed by the problems presented by the many interests he pursued. Lewis M. Dabney has chosen, by and large, to omit Wilson's pieces on the more ephemeral topics of popular culture and on the particular pleasures to be found in minor authors, although the writings on these topics are neither ephemeral nor minor. The volume misses shades in Wilson's literary character in favour of rendering the strong tones. But the strong tones are there, and that, of course, is the first requirement. Especially rewarding are Professor Dabney's incisive selections from the personal memoirs and the letters. They afford a sense of the connection between the pains of the private man and the triumphs of the public man which may easily have escaped many of Wilson's admirers. What *The Portable Edmund Wilson* renders unobtrusively is the way in which Edmund Wilson too may be considered in terms of his famous thesis drawn from the Philoctetes story, that the bow of artistic power depends for its efficacy on the wound of the archer.

But of course the volume's greatest appeal should be to those too young or too preoccupied to have been steeped into Wilson's audience during his lifetime. They are being offered an introduction to a marvellous mind playing over a range of vital cultural matters and everyone should rush to accept it.

Knights of Columbus

Richard Lehan

JOHN FRASER

America and the Pattern of Chivalry
307pp. Cambridge University Press.
£15.
0 521 24183 9

Readers of John Fraser's *America and the Pattern of Chivalry* may at first be startled by the title. After all, modern America prides itself on being without a feudal past or overlay of chivalric values. But Fraser disabuses us quickly and documents how chivalric values entered the American consciousness primarily in the South, with its emphasis on the romantic traditions of honour, courage, and idealized forms of love and courtship. Sir Walter Scott's influence in Europe found its equivalent in the novels of William Gilmore Simms, John Pendleton Kennedy, and G. P. R. James, James Hangerford, and others. If Fraser had ended his argument here, he would have identified a tradition of cultural identity and thought that brought Mark Twain to *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, and that a chivalric ideal was with, and helped to create, a pastoral-heraldic ideal by bringing America back to elemental notions of honour and respect which necessitated a more humane sense of justice. What intellectual historians have referred to as "the genteel tradition" Fraser claims is the name of this "new chivalry" with Teddy Roosevelt among its more perfect embodiments. Fraser believes that a privileged Ivy League education helped to codify this new spirit on the football field at the same time that it was being formalized by novelists like Gilbert Patten in his Frank Merriwell stories or Owen Johnson in *Silver at Yale*. This, in turn, became the imaginative breeding-ground for the genteel novelist, the end-product of which was Scott Fitzgerald in his Basil Lee stories and *The Great Gatsby*.

Out of this tradition in turn came the businessman, embodied by the likes of Andrew Carnegie, whose values are available to his *Triumph of Democracy* and in such popular journals as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers*. On the other side of this cultural coin are the muckrakers, David Graham Phillips and Lincoln Steffens, who challenged the system in the same name of fair play. This also was a time of Irish ward bosses, political reformers, and larger than life prize-fighters, who all somehow become a part of Fraser's paradigm before he moves on to a discussion of the American radicalism of Max Eastman and Floyd Dell, John Reed and Big Bill Haywood, the Wobblies and organized labour. These connections seem clear and necessary to Fraser, but leave the reader navigating in waters that soon become uncharted.

Fraser seems to have written three books here - one on American chivalry, another on the genteel tradition, and a third on patterns of radicalism. The movements between and among these ideas become very slippery and the reader gets lost for some time. Fraser's main sources, isolated in "The Gentleman," a Northern prototype can more easily be found in Robinson Crusoe than in Don Quixote or Sir Galahad. Crusoe, the archetypal Puritan justice, was an intellectual historian's hero; referred to as "the genteel tradition" Fraser claims is the name of this "new chivalry" with Teddy Roosevelt among its more perfect embodiments. Fraser believes that a privileged Ivy League education helped to codify this new spirit on the football field at the same time that it was being formalized by novelists like Gilbert Patten in his Frank Merriwell stories or Owen Johnson in *Silver at Yale*. This, in turn, became the imaginative breeding-ground for the genteel novelist, the end-product of which was Scott Fitzgerald in his Basil Lee stories and *The Great Gatsby*.

despite his Yale education, is devoid of boomer as Quixote is to the new mercantilism. It is precisely Fraser's inability to see his evidence in such historical perspective that allows him to slip so easily from one chivalric notion to its supposed equivalent. And when he adds Nick Carraway to the sequence - the man who lied to himself and called it honour - he seems to be working more with contrary than supporting evidence.

But to resist Fraser's argument is in no way to deny the liveliness of his mind or to discredit the awesome documentation that he brings to this book, with evidence drawn from social

and political history, popular and serious literature, journalism and cinema. And Fraser shows convincingly that beneath American idealism lies a radical violence which the chivalric tradition both intensified in the name of heroic action and yet controlled and rendered "less wanton, brutal, and destructive". It also softened what Fraser rather strangely calls American "neopastoralism", the belief that "what counted above all was the creation of a rational, pacific, contented, and smooth-running world, and that society needed to be coolly ordered to that and by rational professionals... And the more

professional a person became, the more he or she was governed by objective intelligence, purified of merely personal ambition and biases."

Perhaps Fraser's point is best made by the New Yorker cartoon which has one Puritan saying to another as they step off the Mayflower, "My immediate desire is religious freedom, but my long range goal is to get into real estate." Surely, the idealistic and pragmatic senses have long clashed in America, and Fraser, nicely documents this important division in the national consciousness. Whether this adds up to a coherent tradition of chivalry, however, is another matter.

Faith and the fools

Lachlan Mackinnon

TOM QUIRK

Melville's Confidence Man: From Fictive to Faith
127pp. University of Missouri Press.
£13.50.
0 8263 0370 1

The Confidence-Man has been subjected to wider and wider flights of interpretation than are usual even with Melville, and Tom Quirk has performed a valuable and necessary service in offering such an interesting and level-headed discussion of the novel, and its background. His own prose is rather closed and repetitive, but his matter survives it.

Quirk begins by looking at Melville's confidence man, arrested in 1849, and the use to which journalists put him for satirical purposes. And God hath sent some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, etc. - as the text through which Melville developed a satire play into something larger: he takes the bait at the beginning of the novel to be the hero's first incarnation.

an apostolic figure as required by the epistle. The novel does not offer a facile affirmation of moral values, but explores the problems met by faith in the everyday world. He points out that Melville toned down his sacrilegious intentions in the book, he patiently elucidates the role of the confidence man as a touchstone whose presence compels the other characters into self-disclosure, and argues that the novel moves from a scornful contempt to a "humane and feeling skepticism" as shown by the pity of the last chapter.

This emotional development within the novel is made more convincing by being treated as a political rather than philosophical. Quirk is always on the look-out for the telling detail: the incident or word which shapes significance. This attachment to the specific makes him rightly mistrustful of allegorical readings. If *The Confidence-Man* is an allegory, it is not a very interesting one: richness comes from the interminable of allegory - thus Mark Twain's is clearly related to Emerson, but to say that he is Emerson would be a crudely literal Quirk is sympathetic to Melville's poetic enlightenment.

Quirk is also informative on the use made of Cervantes, Shakespeare and

Milton in the novel, but he says rather puzzlingly at one point that Hamlet "assumed no disguise" and cannot therefore be as germane as Melville suggests. Autolycus is preferred as a model. This overlooking of the subtle disposition is an unexpected blunder, but one which indicates what this book crucially lacks. The Hamlet enigma, much like the *Confidence-Man* enigma, the reasons for it lying in our experience reading the novel, and Quirk pays too little attention to this experience.

The Fiddle is a ship of fools, and the reader one of its passengers. Quirk's acceptance of the music as the confidence man rests on an authority rather than on experience, and must do so because part of the point to tell the novel is our inability at first to tell which character is the confidence man (Even Black Guinea's is undoubtedly inaccurate, and Quirk is disturbed by this). In a sense, all passengers are - confidence men. Similarly, we struggle to untie the various Hamlets we see. This is a distinguished book, but it is a great pity that it does not reconcile its sense of the novel with the dizzying effect of the novel on the reader we still lack a full account of this great and perplexing work.

The enigma unexplained

Michael Trend

MICHAEL DE-LA-NOY

Elgar: The Man
240pp. Allen Lane. £12.95.
0 7159 1332 3

CHRISTOPHER REDWOOD (Editor)

An Elgar Companion
311pp. Moorland Publishing. £9.95.
0 86190 024 3

There is a good new biography of Elgar to be written but Michael De-la-Noy's *Elgar: The Man* is not it. The number of the composer's own writings that have been properly published is considerable; many recollections and memoirs of Elgar have found their way into print and there is an impressive industry of secondary work and analysis.

Earlier biographers, in particular Percy M. Young, have cleared a way through these and other more obscure sources and all of Elgar's important music is available on record. Although interesting books on Elgar have been written over the years - the best biography is undoubtedly Michael Kennedy's of 1968 - it is still tempting ground for a new biographer.

De-la-Noy has, however, failed to bring Elgar alive; he has been unable to use these prolific sources in an illuminating way. He has tried to read far too much into many of the "jocular" phrases with which Elgar's letters are peppered. He has taken at almost face value Dora Powell's account of her friendship with the composer. He has also been insufficiently critical of the memoirs of Rosa Burley who, in a different way, ground her axe as sharp as Mrs Powell's. De-la-Noy has been too ready to resist concentrating on the "love interest" - or the lack of it - in Elgar's life. His view is that it was Mrs Powell, "Dorabella" of the *Enigma Variations*, who was the main inspiration of Elgar's music, not, as is the conventional and was indeed Elgar's view, his wife Alice.

De-la-Noy backs up his claim with a range of well known incidents - taken mainly from Mrs Powell's own book, *Edward Elgar: Memories of a Variation* - which he reassembles to show a *ménage à trois* in which the young girl was allowed to engage in "placid frolics" with the "moody genius of forty-three", while his wife was grateful to be relieved of "any necessity to play a romantic role" and was thus able to get on with running her

house. De-la-Noy considers Lady Elgar's ridiculous character and rejects the idea that she was crucially important to Elgar's musical life. The fact that Elgar ceased to compose any music of significance for many years after the death of his wife is passed over. The author instead derides her poetry and calls her marriage to Elgar a "gambol" in social terms. This is a completely fails to explain the mystery of the Elgar's marriage or its effect on his creative life.

That Elgar himself was a deeply complicated man, hiding under layer upon layer of protective covering, nobody would deny, but glibly to measure the composer in 1900 as "now



Elgar by William Strang.

a mature musician and still a desperately immature man" is scarcely helpful. There were indeed strong elements of snobishness and selfishness in Elgar, as anyone who has glanced at his letters will know, but in concentrating on these aspects of Elgar's life De-la-Noy has produced a distorted picture. Elgar was a much larger man than we see here, full of enormous energies and enthusiasms - with a matching sense of fun and of the ridiculous. He could also be a very serious man: his general reading was wide and deep - as his letters to *The Times Literary Supplement* in its early days show. Both these sides of his character are insufficiently explored here, as are Elgar's deep depressions and dark moods.

De-la-Noy is no friend of the composer. He deprecates Elgar's other-hunting; he passes over the "patriotic" works of the First World War in order to admire the later chamber works (a very foolish view this, and though the latter were once unjustly ignored it is equally bilekred to make the same error with the

moving setting of Laurence Binyon's "For the Fallen"); he calls the Elgars "parvenus" and blames the composer for worrying about money - which was a subject necessarily close to many composers' hearts in the days before adequate royalties were paid. The author's weak sense of the history of Elgar's times is also made into a weapon with which to beat his subject. One example will suffice: he disapproves of Elgar for being one of the signatories to the 1914 letter to *The Times* on Irish Home Rule and says "but more than one million people signed the declaration, civil war broke out, Ireland was partitioned and the bloodshed has never ceased".

People who buy biographies of composers do not, generally speaking, wish to be weighed down with musical examples and comparisons, but they do need to feel confident that the author has understood the music and can draw on it to illustrate the composer as a man. It is here that the root of De-la-Noy's failure lies. It is inconceivable, for example, for anyone who knows *The Dream of Gerontius* well to write, as De-la-Noy does of Elgar, that "he was never a particularly religious person". Elgar was, however, a very private person and De-la-Noy's method of trying to expose that privacy - as with the BBC's continued attempts, which he supports, to "perform" parts of Elgar's sketches for his Third Symphony in absolute disregard of the composer's wishes - help us not at all to understand man or music any better.

An *Elgar Companion*, edited by Christopher Redwood, is a book that those seriously interested in Elgar will want to acquire. It contains many of the most interesting articles written about the composer over the years, which normally can only be found in specialist journals or out-of-print books. Here are the relatively well known assessments by George Bernard Shaw and Ralph Vaughan Williams as well as the less well known but equally interesting accounts of, among others, Neville Cardus, Compton Mackenzie, C. W. Orr and Donald Mitchell. There is a particularly valuable section on "Elgar and other composers" but the article on the "Enigma" of the eponymous variations and the "Gerontius Debacle" (taking between them over sixty pages) have long lost their interest for most people, and could well have been omitted from such a collection. There is little here that has been especially written for the book and it is a pity that the opportunity to include a proper introduction was not taken.

Victim of the Borough

Paul Driver

PHILIP BRETT (Editor)

Benjamin Britten: 'Peter Grimes'
217pp. Cambridge University Press.
£17.50 (paperback, £5.95).
0 521 22916 2

The latest in the series of Cambridge Opera Handbooks is also the best, the most purposefully compiled and most pleasurable to read. Philip Brett's *Peter Grimes* frankly and sympathetically faces Britten's homosexuality and discovers it to be the crucial interpretative issue. Brett's article, "Britten and Grimes", first published in the *Musical Times* in 1977, and reprinted here along with a postscript had already made the essential declaration: its single insight immediately resolves the general critical perplexity engendered by *Peter Grimes*. The arrangement of material in this "casebook" is as satisfying as its selection is discriminating.

Brett's written contributions to his completion are considerable: four substantial chapters, three of them specially devised for this book. He also prefaces the first chapter, which comprises reprints of two pieces about Crabbe by E. M. Forster, the first in its original, unrevised form as a *Listener* article, the second a lecture delivered at the first Aldeburgh Festival in 1948 in the wake of the opera's initial success. It was the *Listener* piece, in particular that inspired Britten, who came across it in Los Angeles, to turn to *The Borough* for a possible libretto; and reading it for oneself one can easily see why. Its nostalgic impact could only have been overpowering - a profound and gentle English voice dovetailing, in the Californian West, Britten's most intimate concerns. The lecture, amplifying the critical points of the article, offers an excellent assessment of Crabbe ("Nothing is more remarkable in the best work of Crabbe than the absence of elevation"), quotes copiously from him, and flavours the rest of the book with topographical evocations.

The background to the opera is further explored in an interview between Donald Mitchell and E. M. Forster, widow of the opera's librettist Montagu Slater, a remote figure to us, although a prolific writer in numerous genres. Mitchell, who in his recent book, *Britten and Auden in the Thirties*, managed to refrain from meaty sexual matters altogether, is now gratifyingly straightforward in his questions. Mrs Slater comes across as a delightful, warm, intelligent person, describing the creative battle of the 1930s with charm and vividness, refraining from bitterness either in the matter of the general neglect of her husband (she attributes it largely to his stringent Communist beliefs) or to admiring the disappointment she and Montagu felt when Britten went elsewhere for his next libretto. (He went to Ronald Duncan, who would in turn be disappointed and, indeed, bitter.)

Two chapters by Philip Brett complete the historical section of the book. "Piercy visions" (and revisions) is a superb extended analysis of the surviving documents (they are ample) of the composition of the score and endless re-inhabiting of the text; it shows that "despite the comments, helpful or otherwise, of his team of supporters" - Percy, Slater, Eric Crozier, Duncan and perhaps others - all the discussions, fruitful or unfruitful, it was Britten himself who made all the decisions, whether at his composing desk or later between rehearsals. It also interestingly traces how homoerotic and other psychological shadings of the Grimes character were gradually expunged, although they are explicitly stated in an early draft-outline of the opera by Peter Pears, where the Act I, scene 3, monologue to the boy is found, complete on outright demand for love, and to reveal an obsession with the father-figure. The other chapter is an excellent unravelling of the stage history and critical reception of the opera; at home and abroad which not only provides information but asks the important question of why so few musicologists, particularly in Britain,

were able to look beneath the surface of the work, with its manifest moral ambivalence, at the symbolic and allegorical meaning that lies there. Brett wonders if the music critics were afraid of what they would find and observes that, significantly, it was left to a literary critic, Edmund Wilson, writing in his *Europe Without Baedeker*, to supply a comprehensive and allegorical account of the opera on its first performance.

His fine essay is reprinted here, and makes a startlingly authentic testimony to the greatness of *Grimes*. Wilson, an initially unwilling spectator, dragged to Sadler's Wells by a girl, found himself compelled to describe the occasion in spite of having little technical knowledge of music. He writes: "There have been relatively few composers of the first rank who had a natural gift for the theatre: Mozart, Mussorgsky, Verdi, Wagner, the Bizet of *Carmen*. To be confronted without preparation, with an unmistakable new talent of this kind is an astonishing, even an electrifying, experience." His explanation of the work as an allegory of the dark forces of war and of day-to-day wartime reality is not, however, entirely convincing.

There is a section of the handbook devoted to synopsis and analysis which precedes the critical debate of which Wilson's contribution is a feature. It is fitting and not at all ironic that the task of synopsis, traditionally a purely mechanical one, should be taken by one of the most brilliant of all commentators on Britten, Hans Keller. "Peter Grimes: the story, the music not excluded", from a survey he edited with Donald Mitchell in 1952, is typically astute: "Grimes" cannot show, let alone prove his tenderness as easily as his wrath - except through the music which, alas, the people on stage don't hear". David Matthews's analysis of the music of Act II, scene 1, is very detailed, very carefully considered and very revealing. It forms an estimable complement to Peter Evans's discussion in Chapter 5 of *The Music of Benjamin Britten*.

Brett's sifting of the contemporary journalistic criticism of *Peter Grimes* yielded only one instance which he considers to have more than ephemeral, merely publicizing value, and that is Desmond Shawe-Taylor's mellifluous, two-part report in the *New Statesman*, alongside a *Radio Times* article by Peter Pears and a *Music and Letters* essay by J. W. Orsburn. It enunciates a set of problems concerning the nature and extent of our sympathy with Grimes. Shawe-Taylor and Gerbitt find the transition from Crabbe's roughneck into Britten's visionary not quite acceptable morally and inconsistent dramatically. If Grimes is not really a murderer, why is he tortured by remorse? If he really has a wicked and a dragon ("How the Great Bear and Pleiades"), why should he try obsessively to accommodate himself to the worldly terms of the Borough and its gossip? These and sundry other apparent ambiguities, and the difficulty of precisely understanding Grimes's relationship with Ellen have occasioned much critical worry, although no one has ever doubted that the music bridges all intellectual gaps. Philip Brett cleverly and feelingly points us in his two final chapters to the reconciliation of the contradictions.

Helena Matheopoulos's *Moscow: Encounters with Conductors of Today* (536pp. Hutchinson, £12.95, 0 294 149010 3) assesses the fruits of conversations between the author and a wide range of living (or recently deceased) conductors: "Composer-Conductors": Bernstein, Boulez, Previn; "Orchestra-Builders": Abbado, Böhm, Boult, Colin Davis, Giulini, Hrtlik, Karajan, Levine, Maazel, Mackerras, Mehta, Mull, Ozawa, Solti, Tennstedt; an "Independent Spirit": Carlos Kleiber; "Soloist-Conductors": Ashkenazy, Rostropovich; and "The Younger Generation": Chailly and Rattle. All discuss their lives and their experience of and attitudes towards music and conducting. Henry Pleasants's *The Great Singers, From the Dawn of Opera to Our Own Time* (305pp. Macmillan, £5.95, 0 33 34854 0) has been re-issued in an updated edition.

Heroes in performance

Stephen Pickles

HARVEY SACHS

Virtuoso: The Life and Art of Niccolò Paganini, Franz Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, Ignace Jan Paderewski, Fritz Kreisler, Pablo Casals, Wanda Landowska, Vladimir Horowitz, Glenn Gould.
Times and Hudson, £8.95.
0 500 01286 5

Harvey Sachs's *Virtuoso* is not worthy of his subject. It is written in clumsy, formulaic elevated to interest only by frequent quotation. He is ultimately not very informative about his subject. Ideas are thrown up and poorly developed; obvious connections are missed or ignored.

Writing on Horowitz, Sachs quotes Ivan Davis, a pupil of the pianist, to an anecdotal point:

"I want to show you how I play my scales? And I thought, 'Here it is, the secret that all the world's been waiting for.' Horowitz said, 'I practice slow, high from the wrist and in different rhythms.' Of course, everybody practices that way. I couldn't learn one thing!"

Sachs refers to Horowitz's performance of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto under Toscanini in 1943, and to it as an example of the pianist's "perverse streak" - a streak, now in the last movement, for himself alone to play, as well as

of that performance there is a phenomenal series of solo octaves before the first *Andante*, in which Horowitz wields perverse exhibitionism and musical sense into a virtuoso display. Far from being "in check" this Dionysian thundering would have been a touchstone for anyone hankering after the secret of Horowitz's octaves. It is ignored.

Elsewhere Sachs discusses in detail Horowitz's recorded performance of Schumann's *Fantasy*. "His aspicato playing... is desecrated"; "his *ritardando* begin too soon and are exaggerated"; "nothing could be less spontaneous, less exciting, more unmusical (his handling of the coda itself). Certainly the performance is not very Schumannesque - that is, according to the certain lights - but how useful is this analysis? A performance that is so perverse and yet utterly persuasive if given by a virtuoso. Even if books on musicians contained pages of musical illustrations, only a series of comparisons could support opinions on performance qualities. Sachs often refers to the score with some point, but much of the book tries to simplify things for the layman (who will be confused) and this may disappoint the specialist. Rachmaninov and Halévy, for instance, are not discussed.

The book does have chapters on musicians of whose performances we have no audible record: Paganini, Liszt and Anton Rubinstein. Sachs examines pieces which they composed for themselves alone to play, as well as

contemporary records, for clues to their performing styles. These are the best chapters, although they present a dilemma between historical anecdote and technical analysis. The rest of the book falls to Dionysian thundering would have been a touchstone for anyone hankering after the secret of Horowitz's octaves. It is ignored.

The romantic hero as musical virtuoso is an interesting subject, the history of which Sachs claims to have traced. In his introduction he writes: "From the wandering virtuoso as audience-subduer of Paganini, we have reached the latest and most puzzling development in this history... in his puzzlement he mocks Gould's philosophical remarks and writings. Referring to this eccentric pianist's choice of 'monastic seclusion', Sachs says: 'It is only human, given this attitude, that he should consequently consider solitude to be the condition of heroism.' One can't feel oneself heroic without first having been cast off by the world, or perhaps by having done the casting-off oneself." This is not a very convincing argument, but it is a pity that the opportunity to include a proper introduction was not taken.

to the editor

Formalism

Sir, - John Bayley in a review of Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory* (June 10) makes the astonishing assertion that "the intellectual message of literary Marxism was contained in the formalist doctrines". I admire Mr Bayley's studies of Pushkin and Tolstoy but must correct this strange distortion of historical truth. One can easily collect anti-Marxist pronouncements from the leading formalists. Victor Shklovsky in 1923 made the often quoted flamboyant statement: "Art is always free of life and its colour never reflected the colour of the flag which waved over the fortress of the city." As late as 1926 he declared, "We are not Marxists." The antecedents of formalism differ completely from those of Marxism. The studies of metrics and diction by the Russian symbolist poet Andrey Bely, the aesthetics of the German Broder Christiansen, translated into Russian in 1911, the writings of the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure have to be listed.

At first, after the end of the War, the formalists were ignored by the Marxists but in 1924 Leon Trotsky launched an attack in *Literature and Revolution* which still allowed the formal method a nook and corner in literary studies. Trotsky was followed by Nikolay Bukharin, Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Commissioner of Education, and by a symposium in *Pechot i revolyutsiya* ("Press and Revolution"). In 1930 formalism was branded as "vicious ideological sabotage at the behest of the bourgeoisie," as "utterly false, because it is completely reactionary and reactionary because it is utterly false". The formalists under pressure sought compromises with Marxism, Shklovsky in particular, or moved into other concerns: editing, linguistics, biography or the writing of historical novels, as Yuri Tynyov did. By 1930 the movements were suppressed and individuals were persecuted even much later. Thus in 1944 Boris Eichenbaum was deprived of his professorship at Leningrad University after a violent attack by Iosif B. Papkovsky who accused him of clinging to the "pernicious methods of formalism and bourgeois literary scholarship" (see the obituary in Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, Vol 3, 1979, p. 558).

The idea that "the intellectual message of literary Marxism was contained in the formalist doctrines" is untenable.

RENÉ WELLEK.

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E. H. Carr

Sir, - I would like to comment on the lengthy critique of E. H. Carr which appeared in the *TLS* of June 10. We are invited by Leopold Labedz to compare Gibbon's "sovereign achievement" and "human concern" with Carr's "moral indifference" and "blinkered pedantry". We are informed that Carr's work will not survive and lacks the classic quality of Gibbon because Carr was only interested in power and not, like Gibbon, in freedom.

It is true that Carr's historical qualifications were not as high as Gibbon's. Carr's comparative advantage was in his political and intellectual commitments which were quite different from Carr's. Deutscher himself published a cogent critique of the "early volumes of Carr's *History*" though naturally his criticisms were of a quite different description from those offered by Labedz. Carr evidently found his interest and sympathy aroused by Deutscher's work and it may have had some influence on his later writings. In Deutscher's Trotsky trilogy he found a continuation and development of the Enlightenment ideas and rational methods of the earlier Marxist and Bolshevik tradition, embodied in a work of historical research and reflection. However, Carr did not share Deutscher's view that Gibbon was not best because his work will have value for future Soviet Orientalists and Wilberforcers.

ROBIN BLACKBURN,
10 Eccleston Square, London SW1

Karl Popper

Sir, - Sir Ernst Gombrich is distressed (Letters, July 8) at the "monstrous allegation", made in David Stove's *Popper and After* and endorsed in my review thereof (July 1), that Popper's terminology is characteristically misleading as to his true opinions. Professor Gombrich is "not a philosopher, but... can read", and therefore invites the readers of the *TLS* to examine Popper's publications and judge the matter for themselves. May I simplify your readers' task a little by suggesting they look in particular at p. 19 of Popper's recent *Realism and the Aim of Science*, where he is for once admirably straightforward in expressing his view that all our scientific beliefs are quite unjustified? Even non-philosophers are likely to wonder after reading this passage why Popper takes himself to be talking about the growth of scientific knowledge.

DAVID PAPINEAU.

Department of History and Philosophy of Science, Cambridge.

The British Constitution

Sir, - To answer Gerald Bonner's letter (July 8): the reason the "fatuous" for this reason. The Speaker of the House of Commons is the servant of the House, chosen to preside over its deliberations and uphold its authority; he is not a power in his own right. Part of the strength of his position derives from his traditional impartiality towards the rival factions in the House. Mr Benn's suggestion was that the right of the monarch to dissolve Parliament and choose a person to form a government should be transferred to the Speaker precisely because these may be controversial decisions.

The two conclusive arguments against this are lucidly expounded in David Butler's book (pp. 84-8) but I will repeat them. The minor, technical argument is that there might not be a Speaker in existence at the time when his intervention was required. The major, constitutional argument is that to devolve on the Speaker what could hardly escape at times being controversial political decisions would implicate him personally in the controversy. Few things would be more calculated to weaken his authority with the House as a whole.

One Mr Bonner's other point, to adopt a sceptical attitude towards one branch of the constitution does not imply the absence of scepticism towards the other branches. My own preference is for a system of checks and balances. Respect for traditional constitutional practices is part of such a system. One does not have to be a theologian to be aware of the frailties and errors inseparable from the use of power in the conduct of human affairs; it is sufficient to be a political realist.

NORMAN GASH.

Old Galahouse, Porriway, Langport, Somerset.

Translating Gide

Sir, - This is a perennial mystery that, however faulty a translation, there will always be someone to say it is good. Patrick Pollard in his review (June 10) of Richard Tetchell's edition of the *Selected Letters of André Gide and Dorothy* is a bit of a "moultin" "excellence" of Dorothy Bussy, as a translator of André Gide. The truth is that her versions of Gide's novels are noted for the squeamishness, omissions, elementary blunders and quips that are still his besetting features of the work of many professional translators. She wrote a form of English that odd tongue spoken, one must assume, by people who live half-way across the Channel. All the words are English (of a sort) but the versions of Gide, people themselves, are doing things, stirred by who knows what troubled depths.

They never go to their rooms, they "gain" them. Once there, they have bowls of "smoking chocolata"; and things come not down their chimneys, but "through" them. They call one another "thou" and their wives call them "My dear friend". They read their "lovers' oburgations"; they "surprise bluaes" on people's cheeks; they do things "one last time more" or sometimes even "by moments". They have to put up with "the worst disagreeables" and with reading "words written in printed letters"; they "confide" their child to a guardian and in so doing they "rejoice another being". When they fall ill, a phlebotomist "declares itself", and though they would never run away, they are quick to "save themselves".

If as Frenchmen they own *un cheval arrier*, in crossing the Channel their stellation becomes "a restive horse"; if in France they have *des vaches pleines* their cover livestock are in England merely "fat cows". A damsel's distress may be that *elle est revenue encainte à Paris*; but in decorous English, that distress is not admissible from "the came back to Paris".

Perhaps the worst of Mrs Bussy's misconstructions occurs in a vital sentence of *L'immoraliste*, where Michel watches his wife die and he is *plein d'angoisse et d'attente* - of this the travesty Dorothy made "sick at heart".

Almost the only thing wrong with the Bussy translations of Gide is that they read like translations.

JAMES GRIEVE.

Department of Romance Languages, Australian National University, Canberra.

Little Sparta

Sir, - Since Michael Schmidt's letter (July 1) on the topic of Little Sparta the US Department of State has made representations to the Strathclyde Region on behalf of the Wadsworth Athenaeum, some of whose property was removed from Mr Finlay's stewardship when the Sheriff Officer carried out his Budget Day raid on Mr Finlay's garden temple. And, after only a week's delay, the Region has agreed to return the goods.

Clearly the Region, though it may be to the outside world, does not yet feel prepared to take on the Sixth Fleet. The other owners of the property removed will now no doubt have their goods returned to them, following this precedent - except for Mr Finlay, who is Strathclyde's Enemy No. 1. This moral is clear: if Mr Finlay wants to see his works of art returned, then he must be able to reinforce the law with an overwhelming show of arm. This is Strathclyde Region's notion of justice.

MARTIN WATERS.

Pedlar's Pack Books, Jordan Barn, Wedcombe-in-the-Moor, Devon.

Region fully prepared us for the obduracy and the cynicism of the lawyers. Similarly, the silence of the Scottish cultural establishment during the early struggles to achieve recognition of the Garden Temple's status has prepared us for their acquiescence in the subsequent barbarity of the Region's agents.

JONATHAN BUCKLEY,
In Castle Banks, Leves, East Sussex.

'Approaches to Language'

Sir, - I should like to comment on the oddly eclectic review of *Approaches to Language* which appeared in your issue of July 1. As editor of that volume, I am astonished by your reviewer's failure even to attempt to do justice to its contents.

No mention at all is made of four out of the total of eight papers in *Approaches to Language*. Those omitted are the contributions by F. P. Dinnon on "Language and Linguistics", R. Harré on "Language and Social Action", E. Arden on "Social Anthropology, Language and Reality" and P. Mühlhölzer on "Language and Communicational Efficiency". Apart from the fact that it is one of the primary duties of a reviewer to give an accurate account of what a book contains, the names of the contributors mentioned above are sufficiently well known to make it a matter of some interest to your readers simply to know the fact that these papers have been published.

Having chosen just four contributions deemed worthy of mention, your reviewer appears to miss the point of at least two of them. Furthermore, his general complaint about *Approaches to Language* as a whole seems to be that all the contributors did not put their heads together and agree to discuss the "epistemological approach to language" advocated by himself. This failure is hardly surprising, since that task was in so very part of the brief contribution were given. It is perhaps not objectionable in principle for a reviewer to use a review as a platform from which to advertise his own intellectual wars; but when this is done at the expense of acknowledging what a book has to offer (whether one agrees with it or not), there is a *prima facie* case for saying that a review lacks objectivity.

ROY HARRIS.

Worcester College, Oxford.

Rural China

Sir, - In his review (June 24) of Geremie Barme's translation of *A Cadre School Life* by Yang Jiang, W. I. F. Jenner writes "about a telling indication of the state of a country, countryside twelve years after the formation of people's communes: peasants using their dogs to lick their babies' bottoms clean".

Readers may think that this reference on the backward state of the people's communes. It is nothing of the sort.

We have here an old village near which I witnessed every day in the villages of North Shansi (forty miles south-east of Taining) during my stay there in 1941-43, and later in Chang-chia-ko region in 1949. The dogs are called from outside by a special "erh, erh" to come and clean the mess made by the baby. The dog roaming in the village eat the pig's faeces. Finally the pigs faeces are gathered for the compost heap. This is an old rural cycle of recollection.

WILLEM A. GROOTJES,
Graduate School of Linguistics, Sophia University, Tokyo.

Salvador by John Didion, which was reviewed by Laurence Whitehead in the *TLS* on June 24, is also available in paperback (£2.95, Chatto and Windus, 070139137).

"Among this week's contributors 'Anthony Author' and 'Platform 664' will be found this week on page 764."

Poetry, pedagogy and propaganda

J. B. Trapp

I. D. McFarlane

Buchanan
534pp. Duckworth. Paperback, £9.95.
0713616846

PHILIP J. FORD
George Buchanan: Prince of Poets
213pp. Aberdeen University Press.
£16.50.
0080284532

George Buchanan (1506-82) has always had a good press, though the intervals of neglect have lengthened between his own time and ours. A French contemporary, scholar and friend - Buchanan's printer and collaborator, Henri Estienne, no less - called him "easily the best poet of our time". Since Ronsard and the other poets of the Pléiade were then living and working this is praise neither small nor greatly sympathetic in modern ears. Despite his own strong interest in the vernacular, however, Estienne meant Latin poets and of those a modern count runs to 700 active in France alone during the century. Even to be best of 700 must be accounted something. A sixteenth-century English academic estimate (Gabriel Harvey's) of Buchanan's Latin paraphrases of the Psalms speaks of them as "divinely dainty" and "royally translated"; and Harvey was far from alone in valuing highly the pure Latin of his exemplary poetry. They were set to music, frequently reprinted and were still in school use in the nineteenth century.

Equally well respected and long lived was Buchanan's manual of Latin prosody, and his translation of Thomas Livace on the rudiments of Latin grammar was an even better sixteenth-century seller. Almost as esteemed by Buchanan's contemporaries as the *Psalms* paraphrases were his Latin tragedies, *Lepitha* and *The Bapists*, and his Latin translations of Euripides' *Medea* and *Alceste*. Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* gives honourable mention to their author's "piercing wit" and professes a "divine admiration" at it. Then and since, some have found a bonus in *The Bapists*, for its application to the case of Sir Thomas More and his execution. The author himself, inculcatingly, may be, since he also wrote complimentary poems to Thomas Cromwell and to Henry VIII - endorsed the application. Perhaps the intended lesson was that the fault was entirely Sir Thomas's: Anne Boleyn's, after all. The profane poems were also much applauded. Many were translated, as the fashion was, out of the Greek *Androgyn*; some were also, as the fashion was, highly obscene and drew richly for this on popular ditty and on the anti-feminist resources of Juvenal and Martial. Some of them seem to have been written in the intervals of paraphrasing the Psalms. *The Sphere*, 4,500 Latin hexameters in five books, was still being used for didactic purposes in the *retrograde* circles which promoted the scholastic revival of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It had missed popularity to a new high point. The medieval wing is composed of both historians and literature people; with an occasional rogue classical scholar. There is a respectable number of university appointments specifically for medieval Latin, besides those which allow their holders to go about their business by stealth. Latinists who concern themselves with later periods are less well served; there are next to no full-time appointments. A minority of the historians, in spite of the literature people, at a guess, greatly outnumber the historians. Again, a occasional classicalist, a Perceval or a Meyerson, sets an example of correct grasp of meaning and nuance. By and large, however, the study of Renaissance and later Latin is a moonlighting activity. Both I. D. McFarlane and Philip J. Ford, the authors of the volumes under review, for example, get their living by teaching French.

There are advantages as well as disadvantages in this, especially if we are looking to arrive at a true estimate of Buchanan, or any other neo-Latin writer, as - say - poet rather than pedagogue. Do we have to fall back, as both authors in fact do, on their "having" generally earned the admiration of all

their readers" or an underwriting of Henri Estienne's estimate that he confines it to work in Latin? It seems in some ways a pity if so, but so it probably is. Long ago even Gibbon found it just that the ponderous volume of the Latin works of Petrarch - a far greater poet all round, to say no more - had been abandoned to a long repose. True, Buchanan is harder to know than Petrarch, though Frank enough in many ways, and no under-achiever. Superficially, at least, he seems the archetypal middle-of-the-roader. It would have been good to learn more for instance, about his change of religious allegiance in mid-career, and at what spiritual cost it had been made - but the same might be said of many of his contemporaries. He was

knowledge and exposition of Buchanan's achievement, his intellectual and political background. This is by a long way the best and most comprehensive treatment that Buchanan has had. McFarlane writes from the vantage-point of a fellow-countryman with a solid classical grounding, and an intimate knowledge of the Latin and the vernacular literature of Renaissance France, the country in which so many of Buchanan's best years were passed and which contributed so much to his intellectual formation. He tells in abundant, even sometimes overwhelming detail, the story of the Strlingshire boy, by turns student in Paris and in St Andrews, bedridden and a soldier, who had begun to teach at the forward-looking humanist Collège de Sainte-Barbe in Paris by the time he was twenty-two. By then he was fully conditioned to the medium in which he was first to make his name: classical verse. The Scottish Education Act of 1496 had provided for boys to be taught "perficte latyne", and the Paris university reforms of almost fifty years earlier had laid emphasis on the value of prosody as a means of improving a grasp of the language - hence, one assumes, the over-production of Latin versifiers.

Buchanan seems to have been quick to turn a natural facility to account as a teacher and writer of manuals - activities he was to continue for the rest of his life. He probably began to equip himself with Greek also at about this time. In an atmosphere becoming favourable to its study, and at least to make a gesture in the direction of the coveted status of three-language man: his fellow Scots expatriate Florence Wilson's (Volusenus) gift of a Hebrew lexicon survives in Edinburgh University Library. By the time he returned to Scotland he had a reputation as a pedagogue which won him the tutorage of James V's bastard son and useful royal protection when his satiric verse got him into difficulties with the Franciscans and others. Escaping again to France, via England, he taught rhetoric at Paris and in the celebrated Collège de Guyenne at Bordeaux, gaining the esteem of Lazare de Baif, whose house in Paris was an important centre for humanists and patrons, especially those enthusiastic for Greek. Thus he must have met some, at least, of the poets who were to form the Pléiade. Dorat, the Modern Pléiade, du Bellay and others. In 1547 he set off with other teachers from the Collège de Guyenne for João III's experimental humanist Royal College of Arts at Coimbra. There he fell foul of the Inquisition. This was surely in part because he was, the representative of a new and it was thought, less than pious learning. In part because he held unusual views on the Eucharist and other cardinal points of doctrine, but in part also because - he had eaten meat in Lent when in transit and ill.

Abjuring his doctrinal errors and released from a postally profligate confinement after something over a year, he looked for more congenial employment in Edward VI's England, finding it. By the end of 1552 he was back in France by the end of 1552. He knew Montaigne and, among others, the great classical scholars Turnèbe and Lambin, and enjoyed an established position in Parisian learned society. He also held the post of tutor to Timoléon de Brissac, son of the Marshal of France, and was patronized by the king's sister, Marguerite de France, as well as by Mary Stuart. After returning to Scotland as Mary's man by the end of 1561, he was a pleasantly written survey of the theoretical background in prosody, adaptation, aids to composition of neo-Latin poetry in the sixteenth century and of Buchanan's work in general. He gives special attention to Buchanan's poetry and drama up to 1547, with a more detailed account of his reading and especially of his use of Horace and Catullus. This is followed by a well and economically annotated edition of Buchanan's *Miscellaneous liber*, with a fine and faithful English version on facing pages. Edition and translation are the joint work of Dr Ford and Professor W. S. Watt.

We have been promised more studies, in full-scale bibliography and a new edition of the complete works to commemorate Buchanan's four hundredth anniversary. They will be welcome when they arrive. Meantime we are well served.



A portrait of Buchanan reproduced from the first of the books reviewed here.

not the man to pour himself on to paper in the fashion of Petrarch. His verse is elegantly constructed, distinguished in its kind even, easily accessible to those who have the equipment. *Grosso modo*, it is at least as good as Petrarch's Latin verse.

The trouble comes when we begin to compare it, for quality, with the vernacular, and to speak of a living classical tradition. Then Petrarch and others' vernacular is far superior and more effective. The sonnet that begins "Hor che l'el, e la terra ed il vento..." reworking a famous lyric piece from the *Amel*, for instance, or "Brightness falls from the air/Queens have died young and fair./Dust hath closed Helen's eye", or "Tithon n'a plus les ans, qu'il le fient égale..." - these will do for touchstones, where Buchanan will not. Partly, too, the fault is in ourselves: if we are not antiquarians, and prefer our poetry less exemplary, less solidly crafted, easier. All the same, there is perhaps a certain doubt about the face that looks out from the dust-jacket of Professor McFarlane's literary biography. Buchanan, first published in 1981 and now available in a welcome paperback.

The said dust-jacket also bears that McFarlane has written an important book, magisterial in its

become official propagandist of the anti-Mary faction, much concerned in bringing up his four-year-old royal pupil, James VI, in the right educational, political and religious way. Solid as any Aristotle, he boasted that he had played the tawse on the bottom of the King, if not of kings, at least of Scotland, and a contemporary is on record as thinking that James had the advantage over Alexander. For James, Buchanan wrote his mirror for a prince. *De iure regni apud Scotos*, and as a sort of historiographer-royalist also compiled his *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*. With others in Scotland, he began to turn his thoughts towards England for national connections. There was personal spin-off in this: these were the years of Buchanan's acquaintance with the circle of Sir Philip Sidney.

Through the complexities of this career, McFarlane is an adept, circumstantial and communicative guide, ever ready - where verifiable and precise information fails - with a judicious assessment of the evidence for his "probably" or "must have". Particularly good in detailed accounts of the preparation and publication of Buchanan's works, he is perhaps at his best in his initial survey of the literary and educational scene in France and in Scotland and in his many analyses of the interlocking patterns of friendship and patronage by which humanist existence was maintained and humanist influence exerted. He has an assured mastery of the implications of a liminary verse to a fellow scholar or of a dedication to the maternal aunt of the patron of another, of the available aids to literary imitation in Latin and of the relations between writing in Latin and in the vernacular at the time. For good measure, he adds a thirty-page checklist of Buchanan's works which is also a guide to the whereabouts of surviving copies and an account of such manuscripts as exist, a table of Buchanan's correspondence, a list of portraits of the poet, some family details and the text of his Vito.

This is a formidable achievement, drawing together what was already known about Buchanan's life and works, and adding much new information, much of it in turn the result of McFarlane's own earlier articles. It is also a labour of love. There are occasional signs that it has been a long labour: a few nails are missing, but they are incidental rather than structural fastenings. Thus Mary Dewar's London thesis on Sir Thomas Smith, which McFarlane expresses the hope of being able to consult, was published as a book written in 1965 and strong Smith supporters' club has been active now for some years; L. C. Oastler's Oxford B. Litt thesis on the profile English Reformation printer John Day was published in 1975.

McFarlane's book is the father of the more specialized study, with accompanying text of one of Buchanan's briefer publications, by Philip J. Ford. This small and agreeably presented volume, several pounds lighter than its parent, began life as a doctoral dissertation supervised by Professor McFarlane. The Buchanan of its frontispiece looks more like a man with a capacity for lasting friendship, as described by both his contemporaries and his biographer. Dr Ford's is a pleasantly written survey of the theoretical background in prosody, adaptation, aids to composition of neo-Latin poetry in the sixteenth century and of Buchanan's work in general. He gives special attention to Buchanan's poetry and drama up to 1547, with a more detailed account of his reading and especially of his use of Horace and Catullus. This is followed by a well and economically annotated edition of Buchanan's *Miscellaneous liber*, with a fine and faithful English version on facing pages. Edition and translation are the joint work of Dr Ford and Professor W. S. Watt.

We have been promised more studies, in full-scale bibliography and a new edition of the complete works to commemorate Buchanan's four hundredth anniversary. They will be welcome when they arrive. Meantime we are well served.

For classical read pre-industrial

Margaret Alexiou

SALLY HUMPHREYS

The Family, Women and Death: Comparative Studies
210pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£15
0 7100 9322 5

There has been an industry in death books over the past decade, written mainly for the Western market and preoccupied with death in pre-industrial societies. They range from verse anthologies to historical and anthropological studies, and reflect every kind of traditionalist, structuralist and post-structuralist approach. (Thanatology lives!)

Sally Humphreys's title, together with her opening observation that there can be no "innocent" approach to other cultures, promises to breathe new life into studies of the family, women and death. In fact, this volume is a collection of eight papers, essays and review articles on disparate themes, all published elsewhere (the last two as recently as 1982 in a volume co-edited by herself, with minimal attempts of cohesive discussion or revised presentation. First-person modalizing locutions ("it seems to me", "it does not seem to me", "what I would like to do in this paper is to...") abound; footnotes and learned appendices appear and disappear; while the final chapter is a kind of post-

mortem or "discourse on death" (*sic*), on a seminar series held in 1980, where the expected conclusion is fashionably replaced by a series of questions, some of which should have been answered by now. For example, the absence of a psychologist from the discussion, if it was deemed regrettable at the time, could since have been remedied, although the present reviewer regards the lack of any discussion on the wider literary and cultural perceptions of death as a far more serious failing, as is the dearth of reference to field studies in contemporary "traditional" societies, particularly Greece.

To come to the book's three major concerns. First the family, which is discussed in relation to the city, primarily in the context of classical Athens (Chapters One, Two, Four and Five). The definition of the term *oikos* (household) is certainly problematic, granted the differences between Hellenic, archaic and classical terminology and practice, and the lack of consensus among classical scholars over the relation of *oikos* to *genos* (clan). But why castigate at such length Fustel de Coulanges's *La Cité antique* (1864) for reading into ancient society nineteenth-century bourgeois attitudes to private property and the family (according to the dominant ideology of his time), while oneself deliberately blurring the distinction between the wider family of pre-industrial societies and our own modern "nuclear family"? George Thomson's Marxist analysis of the emergence of both family and state (*oikos* and *polis*) from the pre-historic clan (*genos*) is passed over in the usual

ritual silence; so, more surprisingly, are R. P. Williams' studies of kinship terminology in ancient Crete and Emily Genoule's comparative linguistic research on Indo-European institutions, both of which owe much to Themsen's pioneering scholarship. Thus, a substantial body of linguistic, epigraphic, literary and comparative evidence is ignored, while the tombs of classical Athens are ransacked in deadening detail, only to discover that the archaeological evidence for collective family burial in archaic Attica is "unsatisfactory and hard to interpret", and that the *genos* as a corporate descent group may not have existed outside the aristocracy.

Women form the main theme of Chapters Three and Four. There is one dismissive reference to "matrilinearity" as a myth no longer credited by twentieth-century anthropologists; nowhere is serious consideration given to the evidence for matrilineal succession or to the prominence of female deities in myth and religion. L. H. Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877) gets two curt mentions, while Engels, Harrison, Briffaut, Thomson and Willets do not merit even a bibliographical acknowledgment. Instead, there is a discursive survey of "Women in Antiquity", much indebted to casual references to recent scholarly papers, or based on anecdotal discussion of women in myth and drama; thus, the reversal of male/female roles in the *Oresteia* and Euripides' *Alkestis* symbolizes "a diseased state of society", although "it is admitted that Euripides (three times spent

"Euripides") made some effort to 'get inside the skin' of his characters, and that his drama has 'the ring of realism' about it. Ms Humphreys does not ask how drama—or literature—can be, or has been, related to "historical reality", despite current theoretical debates. She speculates on the relation between heterosexual and homosexual love, but provides little cogent analysis. Nor does she discuss the nature and extent of women's actual power over dowry agreements and rights of inheritance given their virtual control over the rituals of death, marriage and birth, although such power is implicit in much of the ancient proscriptive legislation, which restricts female mourners to next-of-kin and gives rise to new defining terms (eg. *homotelo* "of the same heart") during the fifth century.

Third, death. Despite her complaint that "the study of death is too narrowly conceived", Ms Humphreys makes no attempt to investigate the characteristically Greek perception of death on the levels of ritual and metaphor as marriage and rebirth, partly because she wishes to dissociate herself from outmoded scholarly interpretations of death rites as fertility rites. The ritual connections between death, marriage and birth are briefly acknowledged in the context of Elektra's *choas gamelous* ("wedding libations") to her dead father (wrongly cited as A. *Cho.* 470); but numerous other allusions, even within the same play, are ignored. In "Death and Time" (Chapter Seven), instead of considering pre-industrial conceptions

of time as cyclical rather than linear, covering three generations backward from self to great-grandparents and three generations forward from self to great-grandsons. Ms Humphreys makes arbitrary comparisons between ancient Greek, modern Western and other notions of "the night time to life". She fails to analyse Greek metaphorical terms defining the moment of death as a *rupture* (*psychorrogē* — "let the soul break loose"), still current in modern Greek, and personifications of Death as a violent figure who seizes (*harpagē*) his victims by force, just as a bridegroom seizes his bride. The underlying opposition between death and marriage, mediated by war (*thanatos gamos/polemos*), which goes back to Homer and permeates the imagery of classical tragedy, is ignored.

In short, this volume lacks both the rigour of scholarship (Greek words are dubiously transliterated, eg. *kokkous* for *kokkoi*, "to wall", *agonist* for *agonistai*, "descendants"), while curiously, "descendants" are supported without page numbers to secondary works, an irritating number of which are still "in press", and therefore unverifiable), as well as the vigour of other comparative, feminist approaches (contrast Pat Holden's recent volume of papers on *Women's Religious Experience*). Finally, "comparative studies" are in *prose* useful, one needs to define what is being compared with what, on what basis and why; otherwise there is a danger of merely following sociological trends.

At the end of the 1960s it looked as if the predominant tone of women's poetry for the next forty or fifty years was going to be obsessively Medean. Vengeance, self-immolation, man-hating and blood were the themes of the angry women who followed Sylvia Plath, taking from her brilliant, feverish example those elements best calculated to sustain her note of hysteria. Now, in the 1980s, the overall mood seems calmer.

Heather Buck
At the Window
Stapp, Anvil. £3.25.
0 8546 071 0

At the end of the 1960s it looked as if the predominant tone of women's poetry for the next forty or fifty years was going to be obsessively Medean. Vengeance, self-immolation, man-hating and blood were the themes of the angry women who followed Sylvia Plath, taking from her brilliant, feverish example those elements best calculated to sustain her note of hysteria. Now, in the 1980s, the overall mood seems calmer.

Gillian Clarke's title poem "Letter from a Far Country" is a paean of praise to the women of her Welsh past, to their selfless devotion to cooking, clothing, babies, husbands, nature and order. Coming as it does in the wake of the Women's Movement and domestic revolution, the poem (indeed, the whole book) has the force of a counter-revolution; yet it is a peace offering, a celebration. In the poet's own words, it is her "letter home from the future, / [but] better in the sea which might / take a woman to arrive".

The ambiguity of such a declaration must be deliberate. The poem is being sent to the poet's ancestors from the future, but it is also a poem written to the poet's descendants in the future. Time, it suggests, is in any case cyclical and repetitive in women's lives: "The house and cupboards are full, / the house sweet as a honeycomb. / I move in and out of the hive / at day, harvesting, ordering. / You will find all in its proper place, / when I have gone."

If such an image of eternal domesticity seems idealized to the disliking of contemporary, pre-packaged society, it still rings true as a picture of conditions in rural Wales. Time moves slowly in that country, where lives and lives change little.

My grandmother might be standing / in the great silence before the Wars. / Hanging the washing between trees / over the white and red hens. / So the linkages of nature, memory and laundry are distinctive and moving, despite the hovering shadow of my Ophelia-Prichard who, oddly enough, does not strike a dissonant note. The "Wedding Wind" purity of

the trilogy's third member; but that speculation which Griffith has considered elsewhere and does not accept. Griffith's scheme, with its obvious scope for an "improvement" in the character of Zeus, is both attractive and beautiful.

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0 85635 427 9

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Double Helix
120pp. Manchester: Carcanet and 166 Northumberland Arts Group. £4.95.
0 85635 428 7 (Carcanet)
0 904790 24 X (MidNAG)

HEATHER BUCK

At the Window
Stapp, Anvil. £3.25.
0 8546 071 0

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others — breathes an air of satisfactoriness and completeness which can only be attributed to the excellence of the poetic performance. With their charged language and unmistakable feminine bias, the poems are like positive inversions of Plath's: persuasive, apparently irrefutable, written with impeccable skill. There is, of course, an element of romance about such a view of things. It could be a man's vision, tee, this woman's domain — idyllic, pastoral, a place of timeless mothering and love.

If there were a single phrase to describe this kind of poetry, it would have to be Keats's notion of "negative capability". One might speak instead of projective capability (disregarding Olson's quite different notion of Projective Verse). That is, some poets have the ability to project in language overwhelming images of their own state of mind, whether it be Sylvia Plath's skull-moon and hell-mouthed poppies, or Gillian Clarke's foetus in a chalk pebble and cornucopia of lambs between the horns of a dead ram. Such poetry may be easier to read than more investigative verse, which seeks to discover the reality of objects on their own terms; but no good poems are easy to write, and Gillian Clarke's ring with lucidity and power.

Bolderous in its bone cradle, a stone cracker, / this is its mother's orchard, / it is spire round.

This is Welsh poetry with a vengeance, the relationship of sound between the b's and o's reinforced by the elemental imagery.

Clarke's work is both personal and archetypal, built out of language as concrete as it is musical; Anne Cluysenaar's new book provides a lively contrast within a similar frame of reference. *Double Helix* is a fascinating experiment, combining literal prose with more abstract verse in such a way as to comment implicitly on the nature of each; explicitly it is a book of family memoirs, letters, photographs and poems which chronicle the lives (principally) of three generations of the poet's family. The documentary core of the book consists of Sybil Hewat's readable but unilluminating memoirs of an upper-middle-class Edwardian childhood, while the poems her daughter, Anne Cluysenaar, contributes to the book represent the latter's responsive and metaphorical musings, not only on her own, her mother's and her grandmother's lives but on the nature of time and experience in general. Anne Cluysenaar explains the title in her introduction:

Trying to cross the cultural gaps between myself and my mother, myself and my grandmother, and finding everywhere in the memoirs and in family documents evidence of other such gaps, I found it all that more moving that these signs can be shared. ... So the "helix" of the title refers not only to the spiral of DNA but also to the tensions between past and present, man and woman, convention and expression.

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POETRY

In a state of trance

George Szirtes

PATRIC DICKINSON
A Rite in Time
46pp. Chatto and Windus. £3.95.
0 7011 2653 1

U. A. FANTHORPE
Standing Te
95pp. Liskard: Harry Chambers/Peterloo Poets. £3.
0 905291 35 2

JULIAN ENNIS
At the Frontier
64pp. Liskard: Harry Chambers/Peterloo Poets. £3.
0 905291 42 5

JOHN LATHAM
Unpacking Mr Jones
55pp. Liskard: Harry Chambers/Peterloo Poets. £3.
0 905291 41 7

There are no loves nor gods
Men can invent to explain
How lonely all men are.

Patric Dickinson wrote this in a poem called "Jocelyn Bank" which appeared in his book *The World I See* some twenty-three years ago. That book, like his new one *A Rite in Time*, ended with a lullaby. Loneliness, sleep and love are at once private and universal concerns, and they have continued to haunt Dickinson. In his new book they are seen more intensely and with a greater pathos through the lenses of old age and in the light of the author's own approaching death.

Philip Larkin spoke in "The Old Fools" of days of "thin continuous dreaming / Watching the light move", intending by this to convey a sense of dulled suffering. But is not this "thin continuous dreaming" very like the light trance described by Graves as the proper mood for composing? *A Rite in Time* is a thin book consisting of thirty-five short poems, the last few of which are addressed directly to sleep or oblivion, the state of trance itself. In one of these poems Dickinson describes both the prerequisites for and the fruits of trance: one must first adapt one's thoughts to suit the birds, easily frightened creatures, who are sitting in "their singing tree". This achieved, he cries, "I hear

